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MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES.

Baltimore, June, 1886.

METAPHOR AND POETRY.

In his second article, Prof. Hart twice accuses me of the "confusion of Rhetoric and Style." Let us see. We both think that Rhetoric is not specially connected with poetry. Prof. Hart, however, asserts that my analysis of poetical figures (which I call Style) is "a condensed treatise on Rhetoric"(!); and because it is Rhetoric, he rejects this part of my book. Now Rhetoric is "an *art*, not a *science*, for it neither observes, nor discovers, nor classifies; but it shows how to convey from one mind to another the results of observation," etc. (Prof. A. S. Hill.) I call it confusion to apply this term Rhetoric, the art of making prose, to a scientific process (observing and classifying poetical figures); I call it worse to found an argument on such a confusion; while to attribute the confusion, after profiting by it, to one's opponent—but let us look at Style. I use Style to cover the general field of tropes and figures in poetry: it is a technical, not a critical term. This distinction is all-important. "Style is the man" is impossible as a technical definition; it is like saying "Geology is the epic of creation." When we treat poetic imagination technically, we speak of various forms of the image or picture. We speak of Metaphor, of Personification, etc. We appeal to principles fixed and intelligible to all. The critical treatment appeals to a general and varying sense of beauty or fitness. A teacher is asked for a technical example of poetic imagination: he gives—"Christ's blood, the bath of sin" (G. Fletcher); and he neither approves nor condemns. But, secondly, he may give an example imaginative by the critical as well as by the technical standard: "In cradle of the rude, imperious surge." Thirdly, he may leave the technical, and give the purely critical:

"Here are sands, ignoble things,
Dropt from the ruin'd sides of kings,"—

a literal statement, but filled with imagination; this we know by no technical rule, but by the critical sense. Such things cannot be reduced to standards and rules.—A good text-book

ought not to remain in the first stage, cannot reach the third: it belongs in the second, and the purely critical function must be left to the personal influence of the teacher.

Now let us come to our subject, and examine my critic's "far reaching suggestion" that I should "banish from the study of poetry all consideration of 'figures' and 'figurative language.'" *Pulvis et umbra sumus*; what is stable, what is sure? I had thought imagination and harmony were the basis of poetry; but Prof. Hart says it is a holy alliance of "metre and mood." I had thought that poetry addressed first of all the ear, offering relations of rhythm and melody; but that, with almost equal insistence, it appealed to the eye, offering the products of imagination. The poetic ear translates life into music; the poetic eye reports the facts of a concrete world in pictures. Technically, these pictures are "figurative language." This enables the poet to leave the literal statements and deductions of prose; he puts trust in his eye, and makes no discounts. "Le poëte," says A. de Musset, *Œuv. Posth.* 78, "n'a jamais songé que la terre tourne autour du soleil." That one phrase gives us the genesis of poetic figures. The poet's first office was to create language. Every word was once a poem—"Marry, how?—*Tropically*." "Alle Wörter sind....Tropen. 'Eigentliche Worte' d. h. Prosa giebt es in der Sprache nicht" (Gerber, *Die Sprache als Kunst*, I. 333). G. Curtius (*ib.* 336) says "dass die sprachbildende Geisteskraft der poetischen Phantasie näher liege als der logischen Abstraction."—Then came poetry as distinguished from prose. Brinkmann (*Die Metaphern*, 8) quotes W. Humboldt, that the object of poetry is "das Wirkliche in ein Bild zu verwandeln." What have figures, asks Prof. Hart, "to do with the essence of poetry?" Aeschylus, with his *ποντίων τε κυνάτων ἀνῆριθμον γέλασμα*; Shakspeare, with "those eyes, the break of day, Lights that do mislead the morn;"—have they no answer? Splendid bursts of poetry exist which hardly betray a definite metre, and do not show a single figure; but it is absurd to conclude that metrical form and figurative expression are not essential to poetry as a whole.

"Das Wirkliche in ein Bild zu verwandeln."

Result of this process is the Metaphor in a wide sense,—Substitution, the trope (dealing with the meaning), as distinguished from the figure (dealing with the arrangement, as Antithesis). This general Metaphor, leaving aside minor forms like Synecdoche, has two divisions:

1) It expresses human life in terms of nature; 2) It expresses nature in terms of human life (Personification). Brinkmann has recently made a very useful distinction between Metaphor and Allegory, which latter Blair had defined, and others accepted, as a "continued Metaphor." It is rather a metaphor *figurative throughout*; whereas the ordinary metaphor *betrays the literal* and reveals itself as conscious trope: "*classi immittit habenas*." To avoid confusion, it might be better to reject the name Allegory and speak of "perfect" or "imperfect" metaphors. Let us, then, call the metaphor foundation of poetical style. But here is a difficulty. From Aristotle down, the metaphor (substitution) has been defined as an "abridged comparison" (Blair); "*metaphora brevior est similitudo*" (Quint.); "*eine abgekürzte ('concentrirte') Vergleichung*," etc. Cf. Brinkm.: 25ff. If this be historically true, the simile, not the metaphor, is the foundation of poetical style. A solution of this difficulty was attempted in my "A.-S. Metaphor." The conclusions there reached were attacked by Hoffmann (Eng. Stud. VI. 163ff.) only so far as they affected A.-S. poetry and the theories of Prof. Heinzel. I now state those conclusions, slightly modified, again; and hope to find leisure some day for their defence on A.-S. ground.

Logically, "*metaphora brevior est similitudo*"; but not chronologically, not in process of development. No theory of these primitive processes can be entertained which bases them on formal logical inference. Order comes out of confusion, not confusion out of order. A child, even now, does not call a bird's nest a "house" on the basis of observed relations between a nest and a house: the nest *is* a house. There is no "like" about it, until the child (1) increases his vocabulary with the word "nest" and its meaning, and (2) brings the new word into relations with the old word ("house"). The imagination of primitive man was not analytic. He did not watch some ship ride the waves, and muse: "How like yon craft is to a fiery steed! I liken it to a fiery steed.

In fact, I shall save time by calling it a fiery steed." His restless eye, subject to no fine tutorings of reason, saw an actual horse bound over the "foaming fields" (not, in their turn, based on any expanse" of water — expanse of land"). This immediate vision is revived by true poets,—by Wolfram, say, in his dawn-figure: *Sine Klāwen durh die Wolken sint geslagen* (Lieder, II.). Wolfram *saw* the huge bird. Not by similes did men ever or anywhere build up that vast metaphor, Mythology.* Despite Dr. Hoffmann, too, I think A.-S. poetry bears out this theory of metaphors. How timid, how rare, the similes in the genuine heathen poetry! Its tropes are based on no constant relations. Everything (like the Latin adverb) is something else. One seems to look at things in a kaleidoscope: they are forever changing places. The most prominent figure is Variation. There is no space for similes, since the gap between literal and figurative, abstract and concrete, is so narrow that a metaphor leaps it almost unconsciously. There is no need for the simile-bridge.

I suggest, therefore, the following as a probable order of development in poetical style.—1. That form of metaphor now known as Allegory, entirely figurative, including, of course, Personification. 2. Metaphor proper, where the literal peeps through; as, in *classique immittit habenas*. 3. The metaphor grown entirely conscious of itself, conscious of the gap between reality and figure; divided into a) Implied Simile: "he *is* a lion"; and b) Stated Simile: he *is like* a lion.

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*It must be admitted that H. Spencer is against this application of the theory. He assumes (Synthetic Phil., 'Eccles. Inst.' pp. 684, 692) the origin of animal names, etc. in mythology to be from persons through simile to metaphor, thence to outright identification. It seems to me more likely that original metaphor hardens into literal fact, just as words, which all admit to be original metaphors, become literal statement. The original mythological metaphor may be ascribed partly to the picturesque confusion of names, the "undeveloped language" which Spencer himself acknowledged to be powerful in the process (in fact, p. 685 may be set against p. 684), and partly to the vivid imagination of early man. Later and more curious souls, like Hamlet, institute elaborate comparisons between clouds and weasels.